

The Myth of the Dark Ages: Ireland and England AD 410–1017

MW 2:40-3:55, 203 Shattuck Hall

Stephanie Hayes-Healy

204 Skinner Hall

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00-11:30, 1:00-2:30 and by appointment

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Week 1: Introduction

Fri 9/8: The “Fall of Rome” and the “Dark Ages”.

Week 2: After Rome

M 9/11: Post-Roman Britain and the Saxon “invasions”

W 9/13: Education and literacy in the early Middle Ages

Reading: Excerpt from Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae* (online). Hunter-Blair, pp. 1-18, 25-26.

Week 3: Conversion to Christianity: Ireland

M 9/18: St. Patrick

W 9/20: Looking back on the Age of the Saints

Reading: St. Patrick, *Confession* (online); idem, *Epistle* (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 15-40.

Week 4: Sixth and Seventh-Century England: Politics and Society

M 9/25: Fragmentation to Unity: the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms

W 9/27: Anglo-Saxon Society

Reading: *Beowulf* (in ASW). Hunter-Blair, pp. 27-48, 329-49.

Week 5: Sixth and Seventh-Century England: (Re-)Conversion

M 10/2: Gregory the Great and Augustine of Canterbury; the Canterbury School.

W 10/4: Pagans and/or Christians?

Reading: Excerpt from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, excerpt on Gregory/Augustine (online). Hunter-Blair, pp. 116-31. *The Wanderer* (in ASW); *The Seafarer* (in ASW).

Week 6: Sixth and Seventh-Century Ireland: Society

M 10/9: MID-SEMESTER BREAK

W 10/11: Early Irish Society and Law

Reading: Pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 110-46. D.A. Binchy, “Secular Institutions” (online).

Week 7: Sixth and Seventh-Century Ireland: Kingship and the “Celtic Church”

M 10/16: Early Irish Kingship

W 10/18: The Evolution of a “Celtic” Church (?)

Reading: Ó Cróinín, pp. 41-84; 147-62.

MID-TERM ESSAY DUE by 5pm, Friday 10/20.

Week 8: Sixth and Seventh-Century Ireland: the “Celtic” Church (cont’d)

M 10/23: Irish Monasticism and the Synod of Whitby (664)

W 10/25: The Golden Age of Irish Learning, and the Irish Abroad
Reading: Columbanus, *Letter 2* (online); Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, excerpt on the Synod of Whitby (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 176-232. *Optional*: Kathleen Hughes, “The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage” (online).

Week 9: Eighth-Century England: the Age of Bede and Offa

M 10/30: Bede, the “English”, and the English Church

W 11/1: Offa and Mercian primacy

Reading: Dream of the Rood (in ASW); Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert* (online); Letter from Offa to Charlemagne (in ASW). Hunter-Blair, pp. 142-66; James Campbell, “The Age of Offa and Alcuin” (online).

Week 10: Eighth-Century Ireland: Fragmentation, Secularization and the Arrival of the Vikings

M 11/6: Kings, bishops, abbots, and all of the above?

W 11/8: Reform in politics and church

Reading: Ó Cróinín, chs. 4 and 5.

Week 11: Ninth-Century England and the Rise of Wessex

M 11/13: The Viking invasions **FINAL RESEARCH PAPER TOPIC DUE.**

W 11/15: Alfred the Great

Reading: Asser, *Life of Alfred* (online); excerpts from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (online). Hunter-Blair, pp. 55-90, 166-73, 350-55.

Week 12: Ninth-Century Ireland

M 11/20: Wandering Scholars and the First Viking Period

W 11/22: HOLIDAY

Reading: Excerpts from Dicuil, Sedulius Scottus, Eriugena (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 233-54.

Weeks 13-14: Tenth-Century England and Ireland

M 11/27: Viking Settlement and Assimilation in Britain

W 11/29: Æthelred *Unræd*: Unready?

Reading: *Battle of Maldon* (in ASW); *Sermon of the Wolf to the English* (in ASW). Hunter-Blair, pp. 80-99; Simon Keynes, “A Tale of Two Kings” (online).

M 12/4: Vikings in Ireland

W 12/6: The Eóganacht, the Uí Néill and the Dál Cais

Reading: *Immram Briain* (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 233-71.

Week 15: End of an Era

M 12/11: Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf (1014)

W 12/13: The Accession of Canute (1017)

Reading: Accounts of the Battle of Clontarf (online). Ó Cróinín, pp. 266-8. Canute’s Letter to the English (in ASW). Hunter-Blair, pp. 98-103; Eric Christiansen, “Canute and his World,” *History Today* 36.11 (Nov. 1986), pp. 34-9 (in online journals).

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE by 5pm, Wednesday 12/20.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance is critical for understanding the course material, and 10% of your grade will be based upon your participation in class. Excessive unexcused absences (more than three) will result in a lowered grade.
2. PRESENTATIONS: You will give three oral presentations to the class over the course of the semester on a variety of topics. Topics will be assigned in class. You may trade assignments, but please inform me ahead of time if you plan to do so. Presentations will be no longer than five minutes—they will be timed, so it is a good idea to practice your paper aloud at least once. The presentation should be a general introduction to the assigned text, object, event, person, etc., and a short analysis regarding its relevance in the context of the course. In some cases the selection of topics for a give day lends itself to collaborative work: feel free to work together if you wish.
3. MID-TERM ESSAY: A five- to seven-page analysis of a primary source, which can be a document, object or text from early medieval Britain or Ireland. I will distribute a list of suggested topics in the second week of class. If you wish to work on a topic not on the list, you must clear it with me by Monday, October 2. The essays are due by 5pm on Friday, October 20.
4. FINAL RESEARCH PAPER: A seven- to ten-page research paper. What differentiates a research paper from a simple essay/analysis is the bibliography: you will be expected to consult other secondary authorities on your topic to inform your own opinions. Topics must be approved and are due on Monday, November 13. If you are having trouble deciding on a topic or finding appropriate secondary sources, *please ask me for help!* Final papers are due by 5pm on Wednesday, December 20.

If you wish, your final research paper may be a deeper and more detailed continuation of your mid-term essay topic (which in turn may also be an extension of a presentation topic).

You may submit all assignments via email to shayeshe@mtholyoke.edu, or drop off a hard copy to 204 Skinner Hall. LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL LOSE ONE LETTER GRADE PER DAY.

Generally speaking, you should make sure to plan ahead for all of these assignments. MHC has a good—but not great—collection of books on early medieval Britain and Ireland, so you may need to use inter-library loan or go to one of the other Five College libraries for your sources. Again, please contact me if you are having any trouble finding the right materials.

Grading Breakdown:

- 10% attendance and participation
- 30% in-class presentations (3 x 10% each)
- 25% 5-7 page mid-term essay on a primary source
- 35% 7-10 page final research paper

Required Texts:

Hunter-Blair = Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

ASW = Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans., *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

Ó Cróinín = Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200* (London: Longman, 1995).

Additional Books on Reserve:

*T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

Seán Duffy, ed., *Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005). (In Reference section)

Roy F. Foster, ed., *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 1989).

Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an Introduction to the Sources* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1972).

T.M. Charles-Edwards, ed., *After Rome* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

*Michael Lapidge, ed., *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

P.H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England* (New York: St Martin's, 1978).

*These books have been ordered and will be placed on reserve as soon as they arrive.